

**AN AMERICAN WARRIOR SCHOLAR  
THE NEW COMMANDER  
IN AFGANISTAN**

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ASSOCIATES

### David Rubens Associates

David Rubens Associates is a specialist corporate security consultancy offering strategic security services to individuals and organisations across the world.

DRA has worked with government agencies, NGO's, international conglomerates and major global events, and brings a mixture of strategic vision, operational experience and academic research to all of its projects, however large or small.

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## An American Warrior Scholar – The New Commander in Afghanistan



I have had the opportunity over the last almost thirty years to meet a large number of people who are considered to be ‘world class’, ‘outstanding’, even ‘legends’, and I have to say that very few of them have come up to scratch. This is hardly surprising, as humans are complex creatures and the one truth you can depend on is that no man is a hero to his wife! However, last month I had the opportunity to be present at a speech that was given coverage throughout the world, by General Stanley McChrystal, incoming US commander of the forces in Afghanistan, who, during the hour that he spoke and answered questions (at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London) gave as impressive performance as I have seen in many years. General McChrystal has a Special Forces background, was head of US SF Command, and was most recently Operations Director for Joint Chiefs of Staff. McChrystal is widely regarded as a true ‘warrior-scholar’, typifying the breed of SF officers who understand the importance of culture and history as well as they do military capability.

McChrystal gave a detailed analysis of what was required in order to gain the objectives in Afghanistan, and as he put it, 'Victory will not be not measured by body count or winning gun battles, but by whether the population accepts and supports us'. McChrystal's predecessor in Afghanistan, General David McKiernan, was relieved of his post half way through his two-year assignment, in a large part due to the high numbers of US military and Afghani civilian deaths caused by his robust and aggressive chasing of Taliban fighters, which in turn lead local leaders and communities to perceiving the US military as the enemy, rather than the Taliban.

It is no secret that there are real disagreements in Washington over how the next stage of the Afghanistan war should be developed, with McChrystal openly calling for up to 40,000 more US troops to be sent to the region, a call which received a sharp rebuke when he was recalled to Washington for 'discussions'. A senior US diplomat in Afghanistan has recently resigned from his post, claiming that it is the very presence of US forces in Afghanistan that is the main reason that there is fighting. Countering claims that there is a 'national movement' that goes under the name of the Taliban, which has integrated political and military strategies and objectives, he claimed that in fact the US is facing independent local war-lords and groups of fighters, who often are completely unconnected with similar people fighting in a valley even 2 Km away. 'That's really what shook me. I thought it was more nationalistic. But it's more localism. It's what I would call valley-ism'.

McChrystal set out seven questions in his speech, each of which was designed to set an environment for correct thinking, rather than to elicit specific answers. They were: i. What is the right approach to use in Afghanistan? ii. What environment are we operating in? iii. What is the situation now? iv. Who is winning? v. It has been eight years – why aren't we doing better? vi. Can we succeed? vii. Why bother?

The tone of his argument was set out in his opening comments, in that he immediately discounts the solutions given by anyone who either think that they understand Afghanistan, or who think that the solutions are simple. As an example of the complexity involved in judging what is 'good' or 'right', he gave the example of COIN (Counter-Insurgency) mathematics: There are eight insurgents in a group. You kill two of them. How many insurgent are left to deal with? The obvious answer is 'six'. However, some of those may decide that this is too dangerous, or that they need to go home to help with the crops, or another group might offer them a better deal, so they go away and there may only be two. On the other hand, the two dead insurgents have brothers, cousins and uncles who may now decide that they are going to join the insurgency group in order to avenge their

relatives, so three night later there may be twenty insurgents – and it is the young NCO's and junior officers on the ground who are facing those decisions and dilemma's.

Counter-insurgency is perhaps the most difficult and challenging of all military situations, but having heard General McChrystal talk, I hope (if he is allowed to have his voice heard) that even if there are no clear answers, at least the right questions might start being asked.



The full transcript of General MacChrystal's talk can be found at <http://www.iiss.org/>



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